HURRICANE KATRINA QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

Question: What is the Corps of Engineers role in this disaster?

Answer: The Corps is supporting the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Hurricane Katrina emergency response as a lead agency under the National Emergency Response Plan.

Question: Who is the Corps answerable to during this disaster?

Answer: The Corps will work cooperatively and proactively with Federal, state and local agencies responsible for protecting life and property in the impacted area affected by Hurricane Katrina. The Corps primary support role is to FEMA.

Question: How does the Corps determine what assets it commits for these type of disasters?

Answer: The Corps is coordinating with FEMA to determine the requirements for its Hurricane Katrina support and all Corps assets are either en route or in position to respond to the outcomes of this devastating event. The Mississippi Valley Division of USACE is responsible for the management of Corps Primary Response Teams that are supporting Federal, state and local agencies preparing to respond to Hurricane Katrina's impacts when she comes ashore in southern Louisiana and Mississippi, including the probable strike on the City of New Orleans.

Question: Under what authority does the Corps operate?

Answer: Under the provisions set forth in the national Response Plan, the department of Defense has designated the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as the primary agency for planning, preparedness and response under the Emergency Response Support Function #3, Public Works and Engineering. The type of assistance provided by the Corps includes restoration of critical public services and facilities, including adequate amounts of potable water and ice, temporary restoration of water supply systems, provisions for temporary emergency electrical power, temporary emergency housing, structural evaluation of buildings and damage assessment, and clearance, removal and disposal of debris. The Corps has designated Primary Response Teams from across the nation pre-positioned to provide immediate response to this event.

Question: What is unique about this particular national disaster?

Answer: Should Hurricane Katrina come ashore as predicted, it may be a catastrophic event. Making this emergency response more challenging, is that basically, the City of New Orleans sits in a bowl surrounded by water on three sides. As a result of the terrain that encompasses the City of New Orleans, with the majority of the city at or below sea level, the Corps will have the additional mission of un-watering the city should the levees be overtopped by storm surge or excessive rainfall, or breached post-event to allow gravity flow to reduce the level of flooding within the city from a pre-strike prediction of 12-20 feet in the city. This breaching activity will only reduce the water level significantly to allow for the repair and operation of pumping stations that exist within the city that normally disperse rainfall from the city, but as a result of this event, would have been damaged as a result of the storm surge. Although the gravity flow would significantly reduce the level of flooding in the city, an estimated remaining six feet of water would remain in the city until the pumps were repaired and the flood water is removed into Lake Ponchatrain to the east, or into the marshes on the west of the city. This would be a significant undertaking governed by the amount of post-event damage and additional weather impacts to overcome.

Question: Who makes the determination to breach the levee?

Answer: Working with FEMA, state and local levee boards, the Corps would exercise its authority under the Flood Control and Coastal Emergency Act (Public Law 84-99) to breach the levees forcing the gravity flow of flood waters from the city.

Question: How long will the city remain flooded and at what level?

Answer: The length of time the city will remain flooded and level are dictated by the severity of the event and the ability to bring assets into the city to un-water. The first step will be to breach the levees reducing the flood level from upwards of 20 feet, to approximately 1.5 feet above sea level, which in most case within the city, would still leave a six-foot depth given the city's terrain predominantly under sea level. After the flood waters are significantly reduced to this 1.5 foot stage, the Corps will undertake the mission of repairing the pumping stations that normally operate to keep flood waters out of the city, but would have been damaged by the storm surge. It is important to note again that this is an unprecedented event, and these time estimates are contingent on having the capability to repair the pumps without further damage from follow-on storms. While the repair operations are underway on the pumping stations, repair of the levees would be undertaken where they were breached. It is appropriate to say that contingent on the severity of the damage and storm surge, the citizens of New Orleans are looking at months before the city will be habitable.

Question: What Corps of Engineers' presence remains in the city?

Answer: There is a small contingent of Corps crisis management team members left at the New Orleans District to remain on scene to support City and local officials. The New Orleans District Corps of Engineers Office has been evacuated and declared a victim district, and as a result, the Memphis District Office is coordinating response operations in conjunction with FEMA, State and Local agencies.